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The inundation in Lower Egypt commences in July and continues till the end of September. Now the last day's rain when I was in Abyssinia was 16th September, at which date the wet season closed; thus the flood came down the Atbara on 23rd June, and the rain ceased on 16th September, while the inundation of Lower Egypt occupies a similar period, allowing a short extra time for the flood to reach that country and afterwards to retire.

Arrived at Khartoum, I commenced the necessary arrangements for the White Nile expedition that is now published. Fortunately, it proved successful; but, in spite of that success, I must confess that, although the Nile sources have been discovered, I should still have remained ignorant of the actual cause of the inundations of Lower Egypt had I not previously investigated the Nile tributaries from Abyssinia.

The White Nile, of lake origin, in an equatorial rainfall of ten months, keeps up the great volume of water that nourishes Egypt; but the Blue Nile and the Atbara, of mountain origin, with a short but tremendous rainfall of three months, rushing into the main river, cause the inundations of Lower Egypt, and to their influence is due the extreme fertility of the Delta.

The PRESIDENT said he heartily congratulated the Society upon the production of this paper. It would form a most valuable appendix to the remarkable work on the Albert Nyanza, which Mr. Baker had recently published—a work which was now eagerly perused throughout the land, and which would procure for him a reputation, as a writer, exceeding that of any African traveller since the days of Bruce. The present paper was equally worthy of him, and it was interesting alike to the naturalist, the ethnologist, and to the geographer. He might add, that Mr. Baker had placed in a clear light the relations of the Atbara and Blue River to the main stream of the Nile, and had shown by actual observation that it was to those affluents that the great river owed the rich sediment which, deposited by inundations, was the source of the fertility of Egypt. Before he called for any observations upon the paper, he would ask the Secretary to read a very interesting communication from Mr. Rassam, Her Majesty's Envoy to the Emperor of Abyssinia, which formed part of a letter he had written to Colonel Playfair.

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## 2. *Extracts from a Letter of Mr. RASSAM to Colonel PLAYFAIR.*

MY DEAR PLAYFAIR,

Korata, Lake Tsána, 22 March, 1866.

In my last letter I informed you that I had received a letter from the Emperor, in which he asked me to come up *viâ* Kassala; and consequently I was obliged to go to Egypt for the necessary papers from the Egyptian Government to enable me to pass through Soudan. Towards the end of September, I found myself back in Massowah, accompanied by my old companions Dr. Blanc and

Mr. Prideaux. As ill-luck would have it, the cholera broke out soon after our arrival there, and a great number of deaths occurred daily in the island and the surrounding country; the people were terror-stricken, and you can fancy the difficulty we had to get any of our preparations made. The authorities, however, gave us all the assistance in their power, and we were enabled to start for Kassala, as I had intended, on the 15th of October. We had much difficulty on the road from want of sufficient carriage; nevertheless, we reached Kassala on the 6th of November. The Governor, on hearing of my approach, sent out a regiment of infantry and two squadrons of Bashi-Bazooks to meet me about a mile from the town. We found Kassala quite ruined, owing to the late mutiny of the Soudan troops. Most of the mutineers had been destroyed, and their wives and children taken captives by the authorities. It was said that 800 of the former and as many of the latter were in prison while we were at Kassala. What with the mutiny, cholera, and malignant fevers, the natives were almost destroyed. Not a grain of wheat or rice was to be obtained for months, and even the highest Turkish officials had to subsist on millet. In consequence of these misfortunes, we had great difficulty in obtaining camels for our luggage, as those we had brought from Massowah could not go further, and we were detained there four days.

After a journey of eleven days through a very hot region, we reached Matemmo, the residence of a negro chief who is obliged to pay tribute both to Abyssinia and Egypt. Thence I sent messengers to the Emperor, apprising him of my arrival at the frontier of his dominions, and, after waiting thirty-five days, I received a very courteous reply, welcoming me to his country, and informing me that he had issued orders to all his deputies, on my way to his Court, to afford me every assistance, and to supply me with provisions and carriage free of expense. These orders were carried out to the letter; everything was provided on the road on the most liberal scale, and sometimes our daily rations reached as high as 1000 loaves of bread, 2 cows, 20 fowls, 500 eggs, 10 jars of milk, as much honey, and abundance of sour milk, red pepper paste, &c. Our baggage was carried on men's shoulders all the way, and on starting we had no less than 1200 porters and a guard of 200 men and 5 officers. The country through which we passed was most beautiful; and it was no small pleasure to me, after my long residence in Aden, to ride through groves of wild rose and jasmine bushes.

After a month of slow marching and numerous halts, we reached the Emperor's camp at Damot, about 50 miles south of Lake Dembea.

This fortunate day, which I had been anticipating for more than a year and a half, was the 28th of January.

On hearing of my approach, his Majesty despatched a guard of honour to receive me, consisting of 300 officers of high rank, headed by the Prime Minister, who received me on foot, assured me that his master welcomed me most cordially to his country, and made many inquiries after my health. He then presented me with a fine mule, saddled and bridled, and said that his Majesty had sent it for me to ride on to his camp, at the same time apologising for the meanness of the gift, and saying that his Majesty hoped to make me a more suitable present hereafter.

We then mounted our animals and proceeded to the royal Court. The King was then on an expedition against the rebels of Gojam, and had an army estimated at 45,000 fighting-men, with as many male and female followers.

The Emperor had a tent of red cloth pitched for my reception; and, after having rested there for a couple of hours and eaten a good breakfast, sent to us from the royal kitchen, we were summoned to Court. The Emperor's tents were pitched on the summit of a hill, and ours were at the foot of it. A double street of musketeers was formed from our tents to the royal pavilion, and, as soon as we got within sight of the latter, the soldiers began to discharge their pieces, and continued to fire in regular order until we were ushered into the King's tent.

This was made entirely of silk and carpeted with the same material. His Majesty was reclining on a couch; on either side of him stood his ministers and the officers of the Court. I advanced, and presented the Queen's letter; and, after a few words of civility, we were invited to sit down, which we did, on the right hand of the Emperor. Her Majesty's letter was written in English, and, as there was no one present who could read that language, the Emperor laid it on the couch beside him, and, after making repeated inquiries as to our health and whether we had recovered from the fatigue of the journey, he commenced entering on a statement of his grievances and of everything that had taken place since he lost his favourite Englishmen, Plowden and Bell. . . .

The next morning his Majesty again sent for me, and to my inexpressible delight, informed me that, for the sake of my Queen, and to show his anxiety to retain her friendship, he had ordered the release of all the prisoners, and had directed them all to be made over to me to take with me out of the country. . . .

The next day his Majesty set out for the district of Meteha; we travelled with him for five days, after which my companions and I

set out for this place to await the arrival of the captives. The Emperor was extremely kind and courteous all the time we were with him. On one occasion he told me why he had not answered my letters sooner. "Because," said he, "since the death of Plowden and Bell, all the English and Franks who visited my country appeared insane, ill-mannered, and ill-tempered. I said to myself, 'I must not see this English agent till I see whether he is of the same temperament as those who created a breach between me and the Queen of England.' Your patience in waiting so long for an answer has convinced me of your worth; and now, as you have happily established a renewal of friendship between this country and England, I wish you to convey to your Queen and to her Council my anxiety to cultivate the friendship of England, which I have been longing for ever since I ascended the throne of Abyssinia."

The Emperor wished us to remain here till the arrival of the captives, and he sent to Debra Tabar for all the European artizans and their families to come and keep us company; so we muster quite a large party of Europeans.

Although the order for the release of the captives was given on the 29th of January, the distance is so great that they were not relieved from their fetters till the 24th ultimo; they all arrived in safety at this place on the 12th instant, and, with the exception of Cameron, who is somewhat weak, they are all in excellent health. They number 18: namely, 4 English, 2 French, 10 Germans, 1 Italian, 1 Hungarian; and amongst the number there are 2 ladies and 3 children.

The King presented me with 10,000 dollars for my expenses. I tried all in my power to be excused receiving this sum; but, as I was told that my refusal would greatly displease his Majesty, I deemed it prudent to accept his gift, which I have, of course, credited to her Majesty's Government. Furthermore, to show me respect, he issued orders that I should be treated generally with the same marks of honour that were accorded to himself; accordingly, on my arrival here, I was received by a procession of about 60 priests, who came to the beach of the lake to meet me, dressed in full canonicals, bearing in their hands all the symbols used in the Abyssinian Church, and chanting psalms and prayers for our welfare. His Majesty heard that on one occasion we were badly off for milk, and he immediately ordered 50 milch-cows to be placed at our disposal, and these animals have been here ever since. He has ordered a gold saddle, shield, bracelet, and dagger to be made for me; and the same, *minus* the saddle, for my companions Blanc and Prideaux.

I give you all these details to show you how well the Emperor has behaved towards me, and what an unexpectedly favourable turn the Abyssinian complication has taken. At one time we were afraid that Dr. Beke's mission would spoil the good understanding happily subsisting between us, but it does not appear to have had any evil effect. The Emperor sent me Dr. Beke's letter the other day, together with the petition from Cameron's family, with the remark that he had already released all the prisoners for the sake of our Queen.

He was anxious to see the released captives, in order that he might ask them in my presence whether he had not been justified by their conduct in his behaviour towards them. But I dreaded lest some cause of irritation might arise at this interview; so I begged him to dispense with their attendance, and suggested that, if he had any charges to prefer against them, he might send them to me to read to them. Accordingly, on the 15th he sent the document, with a request that I would read it to the prisoners in presence of all the other Europeans and a number of Abyssinian officers whom he appointed to attend. All the prisoners confessed that they had been to blame, and begged to be forgiven.

The Emperor has requested me to visit him once more, to have some talk with him; but I trust that he will soon give us leave to depart; but in any case we shall not get away before the Abyssinian Easter, which falls on the 8th proximo. I am not certain which route we shall take.

The reason the Emperor has sent us to stay at Korata—which is a large town, situated at the extreme south-east side of the lake—is because he thought we should enjoy the fishing and shooting for which it is celebrated; moreover, the shore is clean and rocky, while the opposite bank is muddy and covered with decaying vegetable matter. He himself is at Zagay, about five miles from where the river Abai leaves the lake. . . . Cameron sends his kind regards; he is improving in health daily.

The PRESIDENT, in returning the thanks of the Society to Colonel Playfair, was almost disposed to add their thanks to the Emperor of Abyssinia for having treated the Queen's envoy so well. The result had been to modify the opinion he had held of the character of that monarch. He believed Colonel Playfair would explain to the meeting several circumstances connected with the expedition, which were noticed in the letter, particularly in reference to the two Englishmen, Plowden and Bell, who were formerly in the service of the Emperor of Abyssinia, and who had acted, indeed, as his advisers. It was on the loss of these gentlemen that he changed his conduct towards Europeans.

Dr. BEKE said he wished to speak with reference, more particularly, to the river Gāsh; but as his name had been mentioned in connection with the libera-

tion of the captives, he would merely say upon that subject, that the petition which he forwarded to the Emperor from the relatives of the captives deeply touched his Majesty's heart. He had no doubt that, had not the Emperor liberated the captives, as he is reported to have declared, for the sake of the Queen of England, he would have done so for the sake of their distressed relatives. The Gâsh was a remarkable river. The Greek geographer Artemidorus spoke of a "branch of the Astaboras" which divided into two; one part running into the *Atbara*, which was formerly regarded as the *Nile*, and the other into the Red Sea. It had long been a matter of speculation with him—and he regarded it as now proved—that the Gash was this river. It gave rise to an important geographical and political question, as to the power of the Ethiopians, or Abyssinians, to divert into the Red Sea the waters that supplied the Nile. The project had not only been entertained for many centuries, but the present Emperor Theodore had it in view, should he conquer that country, with the intention of destroying Egypt. Albuquerque proposed the same thing to Emanuel, King of Portugal, in the beginning of the sixteenth century. In 1842 a Turkish pasha endeavoured to turn the Gâsh into the *Atbara*. He built a dam, and nearly succeeded; but the dam was not strong enough. By a contrary process, the *Atbara* could be turned into the Gâsh. He mentioned this as a remarkable confirmation of the statement of Artemidorus made upwards of two thousand years ago. He agreed with Mr. Baker that it was that river which gave the fertilising soil to Egypt, and therefore, were it turned, Egypt would be ruined.

Colonel PLAYFAIR said it should be understood that the letter which Mr. Rassam sent to him was a private communication. He had not the slightest suspicion that any part of it would be made public. It was so mixed up with private matters that he had to erase a great number of sentences. Therefore, if the communication appeared fragmentary, they must lay the blame on him, and not on Mr. Rassam, for the letter in its original state was exceedingly well written. In the letter he mentioned that the Emperor of Abyssinia said all the Englishmen had been insane that he had seen since the death of Plowden and Bell. It might be known to most people that Mr. Plowden was her Majesty's consul in Abyssinia. He resided in that country for many years, and took rather a prominent part in the politics of the country; in fact he was almost King Theodore's minister. Mr. Bell was in reality the king's minister. He was his robe-wearer, a sort of *alter ego*. It was his duty to go into battle, dressed in the robes that the king usually wore, and thereby divert to himself the danger which otherwise would have attended the king's position in battle. He thought from Mr. Rassam's letter that two things were manifest: first, that Mr. Rassam had executed the very difficult mission entrusted to him with singular tact and judgment; and secondly, that King Theodore, like another person to whom he had been compared, was not quite so black as he was painted.

The PRESIDENT, in closing the meeting, said it only remained for him to congratulate the Society upon the termination of a session productive of most remarkable results. The *finale* of it had been quite as successful as the commencement; for they had commenced and finished with the discoveries of their distinguished Associate, Mr. Baker. He now adjourned the meeting to the 12th of November, when he hoped to see the room as full as it was on the present occasion. He trusted the motto of the Society would continue to be, "Forward, ever forward."

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